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Hays Relevance and Application Paper 2/18/22

In his book “Every People and Nation” Hays addressed the race issue from the biblical perspective and the three points that I would like to discuss in this paper are 1) All human races are created in the image of God, from Genesis 1:26-27; 2) Intermarriages between the Israelites and other peoples were permitted by God in the old testament; 3) God’s heart to make the gospel be known to all nations and races.

Genesis 1:26-27 stated that human was created in the image of God in the beginning, before human races were even known or developed. As Hays correctly pointed out, “the division of humankind into peoples and races is not even mentioned until Genesis 10. Adam and Eve, as well as Noah, are non-ethnic and non-national. They represent all people, not some people.”<sup>1</sup> It is not in alignment with God’s heart when people consider one race or a skin color superior than others. It is people’s sinful desire to rule other people out simply because they look different. And to deprive others of their rights because they are weaker than us exposed human darkness of greed, manipulation, and bigotry. This mentality of prejudice or ethnocentrism long existed and could be seen in the Greco-Roman world in the early Christian period in the first century, “they perceived themselves as superior to all those who were different, and thus the Romans occasionally would criticize or mock those groups that differed from them.”<sup>2</sup> It then became full-blown when European imperialism started to bloom in the 15th century, native people who lived in the land originally were forced into slavery or subject to colonization. And to justify the sinful pattern of slavery or the outcome of colonization using scripture (the so-called Curse of

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<sup>1</sup>Hays, J. Daniel. *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2003, 48.

<sup>2</sup> Hays, *People and Nation*, 149.

Ham)<sup>3</sup> is utterly wrong and lacks the basic understanding of God's heart for all peoples in this world. God's heart is to bless all as indicated in the Abrahamic blessing in Genesis 12, and such blessing was later consummated through Jesus. Theologians who wrote books that propagated the wrongful association of the curse of Ham with the slavery of Black people further inflicted hurt on the enslaved and their next generations who have suffered so much from centuries of social injustice.

Intermarriages between the Israelites and peoples outside of the promised land Canaan were permitted by God in the Torah. It was the people in Canaan that God did not allow the Israelites to marry. As stated by Hays, God's prohibition of such intermarriages had no bearing on race, rather, it was because intermarriages with the Canaanites would bring apostasy of the Israelites that they would turn away from Yaweh and worship gods of the women that they married, as stated in Deuteronomy 7:1-4. Intermarriages otherwise were affirmed by God, as seen in God's punishment of Miriam after she spoke against Moses' marriage with a Cushite woman. In addition, Phinehas the priest, the descendant of Aaron's son Eleazer and a Cushite woman, played a significant role in the priestly genealogy of Levi. These accounts in the Torah indicated that God's approval of intermarriages between races, when conflict in faith was not involved in the marriage. How should this concept be applied to today's world? If Christians were taught correctly about God's view of interracial marriages, would they be more adapted to the idea? Or would the hurdles involved with interracial marriages still be too challenging? Interracial marriages require quite many changes in culture, language, and customs in the families involved. The struggles can be seen in an example between the marriage of Asian and another race, which might hit close to home for some Asian American Christians. Myself being Chinese American, I have come to know many fellow Chinese American Christians and heard of

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<sup>3</sup> Hays, *People and Nation*, 51.

comments like “I would not want my daughter to marry someone who is not Asian, even when the person is a Christian. I want my Chinese traditions to carry on and I cannot communicate with him.” So faith was not the first consideration in this case, as opposed to God’s prohibition of intermarriages because of faith conflict. Sadly, often times, our own culture, background, and preferences presided and took precedence over God’s view.

Lastly, God’s heart to make the gospel be known to all nations and races can be seen more clearly during the new testament era. First of all, the people who were known as Greeks during that period was not purely Caucasian but they were multi-ethnic.<sup>4</sup> This sets the stage where the gospel was spread. Then as indicated in Matthew 1, four women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba) in Jesus’ genealogy were Gentile and therefore racial purity in the family where Jesus came from was allowed, or even intended by God. In Matthew 8:1, where it says ‘many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside...’<sup>5</sup> this is only one of places in the Bible that clearly specifies that the gospel would be spread to the Gentiles. What does this mean for us today? Ethnocentrism is not unique only among Caucasians, it is prevalent in every culture here in America. It is certainly present at the Chinese church that I am attending. Chinese people are proud of our own culture, while it is good to honor one’s own culture, it is another thing when one becomes too self-absorbed to care about the salvation of people of other races. We have an English congregation so language is not a barrier to welcome people of other races and we are situated in a culturally diverse neighborhood. Recently, we started a ministry to reach out to our neighbors by giving out supplies and praying for them. We started to take eyes off of ourselves and care for people of

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<sup>4</sup>Hays, *People and Nation*, 156.

<sup>5</sup>Hays, *People and Nation*, 158.

other races in our neighborhood. It is my prayer that my church would cross over the barrier of skin color and culture and embrace people of other races, that we would acknowledge and work towards God's plan of spreading the gospel to all peoples.